

Species in the Spotlight

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Papyrus Sedge (*Cyperus papyrus*)

The Papyrus Sedge (*Cyperus papyrus*) (Figure 10.15), although globally assessed as Least Concern (Beentje, 2017), is under threat regionally due primarily to land-use changes, such as draining and burning of wetlands for grazing and development (Figure 10.16). This species is used in all countries of the Lake Victoria Basin in a diversity of ways, such as for roof thatching, building walls and for making products such as rafts, mats, baskets, ropes and fish traps. It also has many medicinal uses, including as treatment for a variety of acute and chronic diseases. Many communities use this species as the primary material for these purposes. Papyrus Sedge dominates the landscape in some wetland communities of Uganda's south-west, where many people depend on its sale for their income. The great importance of Papyrus Sedge wetlands for livelihoods of millions of people in Africa, as well as to biodiversity and to the regulation of water quality and quantity, is summarised by van Dam *et al.* (2014). What is notable about the local uses of Papyrus Sedge is that the volume of harvest tends to represent only a small portion of the total plant population. Both the harvest and the management practices related to the growth of Papyrus Sedge are considered beneficial to the species and other species in the region. For example, Papyrus Sedge is important to the livelihoods of the Endorois community living around Lobo swamp in Kenya as a source of income (selling of mats), cattle fodder, roofing materials and fuel for cooking. The Endorois community gather Papyrus Sedge from the swamp and, in response to emerging uses of the plant, they have implemented a number of management practices. These include banning burning of Lobo swamp and limiting entry to it during the rainy season, selective and rotational harvesting of Papyrus Sedge, and controlling proliferation of *Typha domingensis*. Additionally, the community protects the swamp by controlling cattle grazing and prohibiting cultivation near the swamp, and chasing away wild animals. These practices are all compatible with the management priorities of the swamp and a wider conservation framework (Terer *et al.*, 2012), benefitting both Papyrus Sedge and other freshwater biodiversity in the region.

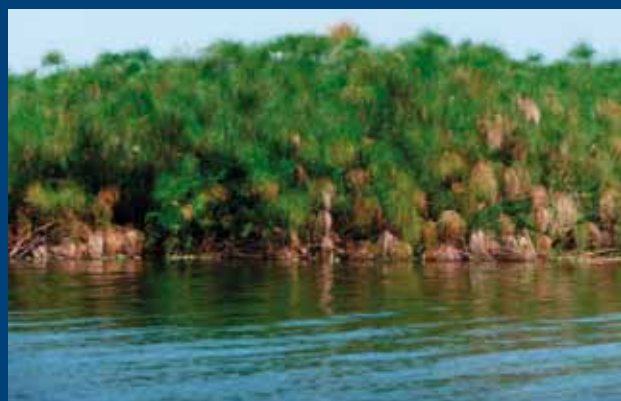


Figure 10.15 Papyrus Sedge (*Cyperus papyrus*) on the Ugandan margin of Lake Victoria. © William Darwall

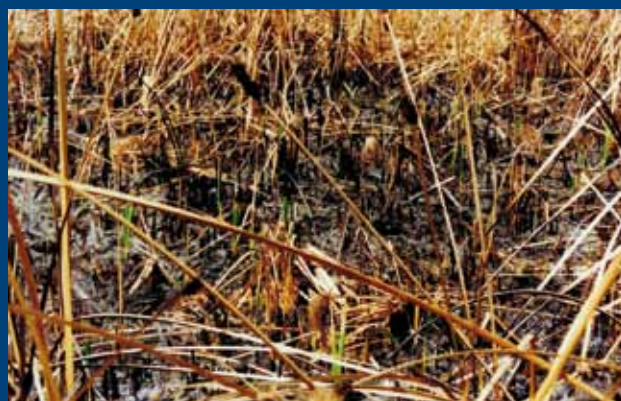


Figure 10.16 Burning of the wetland habitats of the Papyrus Sedge (*Cyperus papyrus*) threatens this species, which is of high livelihoods value. © Reuben Omondi

Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*)

The Common Reed, *Phragmites australis* (Figure 10.17) is another freshwater plant species of value to local livelihoods and is globally assessed as Least Concern (Lansdown, 2015) but is facing threats in the Lake Victoria Basin. Common Reed is a grass that is widespread in nearly all wetlands in the Lake Victoria Basin. It is usually found along riverbanks, or behind *Cyperus papyrus* on the margins of lakes. The population within the basin is, however, declining due to widespread degradation of riverbanks, overharvesting and burning of wetlands. It is also threatened by desiccation due to falling water levels as a result of climate change. The plant is used for various purposes including construction, fencing, craft-making, fish trap construction, human and livestock food, and medicine.



Figure 10.17 Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). © Samuel Nshutiyayesu

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